

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE C-1

WASHINGTON POST
29 January 1985

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Frank Sinatra & the Dead Issue

Now that the inauguration is over, historians can ponder some of the great words spoken during the weekend by statesmen who participated in the events.

Probably the most memorable were not uttered by President Reagan in his Inaugural Address but by Frank Sinatra, who told "Entertainment Tonight's" Barbara Howar, "You're all dead, every one of you. You're all dead."

At the time it was believed Mr. Sinatra was reacting to a piece about him in The Washington Post concerning his association with Hollywood's so-called "Rat Pack," and that he was addressing the media in general when he made the remark.

But after giving it a lot of thought, Washington historians are now divided on the meaning of the singer's outburst.

Last Friday night the issue was discussed at the I Did It My Way Bar and Grill.

A reporter from the National Review said, "I can't believe Frank was talking about the press. No one let him finish his sentence. What he was trying to tell us was that we were all dead if we didn't support President Reagan's 'Star Wars' program."

"Then why didn't he say that?" the New York Times man asked.

"Because he just assumed that

anyone with intelligence knew where he was coming from."

A columnist from The Washington Post disagreed. "I ran the tape of his remarks over and over again, and he was talking about the media. The only thing I still haven't decided is whether he meant it figuratively or literally."

"I'm sure he didn't mean it literally," a lady from Women's Wear Daily said. "Even Frank Sinatra couldn't put out a contract on every person covering the inauguration. My interpretation of his remarks is that we were all dead as far as talking to him was concerned."

"But we've all been dead for years in Frank's mind," a CBS reporter protested. "That's not news."

"It was only news," I said, "because Frank was in charge of the inaugural gala. I'm inclined to go along with my colleague from the National Review that Sinatra's words were misinterpreted. I have it from a high source in the surgeon general's office that what Frank was really trying to say is that we'd all be dead if we had to cover the inaugural parade in minus-20-degree weather. His main concern was that we would bundle up and keep warm."

Barbara Howar, the only one who had been there, said, "He didn't sound as if he was worried about me getting pneumonia."

"Frank never likes to show his

true feelings," I told her. "Every time a sparrow falls he cries."

The Washington Post reporter refused to be persuaded. "I still believe he wanted us all dead. Maybe not *dead* dead, but enough so we would never write about him again."

A photographer from People magazine said, "Is it possible Frank was saying we'd all be dead if we bet on the Miami Dolphins in the Super Bowl?"

"Could be," I agreed. "Now that you mention it, Frank was always a big 49ers fan."

The Wall Street Journal man said, "The big question is, if Sinatra was referring only to the media, was he speaking for the administration or just himself?"

"Ronald Reagan doesn't want us all dead," Sam Donaldson said. "I talk to him every day."

"What about the CIA?"

"No one knows who they want dead, and who they don't," a reporter from Jack Anderson's office mused.

I insisted on having the last word. "I don't believe we're in a position to judge what Frank meant by his remarks. The important thing is they will be remembered long after all the other 1985 inaugural utterances are forgotten, and will be an inspiration to generations of inaugural gala chairmen for years to come."

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